

Editorial Department.

MEDICAL BOOK REVIEWING.

ONE of the principal functions of medical periodicals is to improve the frequent opportunities they have of critically reviewing medical writings, whether periodical or occasional, as they appear, with the aim of endeavoring to point out, alike their excellencies and defects, either as regards matter or style, and of establishing and spreading the truth, and of overthrowing error, at least in so far as may be possible on the part of those who conduct them. In this way they may exercise a most salutary influence on medical literature, and the progress of medicine. Medical periodicals not only have such a function in this respect, but also a *duty*. But as a rule, how inadequately is this function and duty discharged. We but state the truth when we say, that in the majority of cases medical book reviews amount to little more than mere booksellers' notices. The title of the work is given, the number of pages, the number of the edition, and then the writer, after a glance at the table of contents and preface, and some of the illustrations, if there are any, writes his notice, let us suppose, as follows:

"It was our intention to have written a lengthy review of the volume before us, in which we would have endeavored to have noticed certain defects and shortcomings which it contains, and in which, in our judgment, it is open to criticism. But want of space, and the time from absorbing occupations, will not permit us to do this. The work, however, contains many valuable facts and suggestions, and in spite of its defects, may be considered as an accession to medical literature, and will hence repay perusal. The illustrations are, upon the whole, clear and useful. The work is issued in the usual handsome

style of its enterprising publishers, being highly creditable in typography and binding. The price is \$6.00 cloth, or in calf \$7.00." With the exception of a very few, some such form would too often represent, in length and fullness, a "review," even of an important volume, in many periodicals, whether in this country or abroad. We mean to say that medical journals, as a whole, are not acting up to the full level of their duty in this respect, and that the tone of medical literature, and some of the best interests of medicine suffer in consequence thereof.

In order properly to fulfill the function of the reviewer, it is necessary to have *intelligence*, general and special, but also that most rare of all qualities, in such cases, a healthy, well-balanced *sympathy*. The reviewer must not only be acquainted with the subject, but he must be able by means of a catholic sympathy, to place himself in the exact position which his author occupied. This is the cardinal grace of a reviewer. Without it he cannot consciously avoid misrepresenting, at least, the spirit and feeling of his author. And how often do we see the most pitiable and provoking exhibitions of this kind, their authors being all the while unconscious of them?

But it is not enough to be intelligent and sympathetic: the reviewer must be *candid*, intent on presenting a case just as it is, its excellencies as well as its defects, with all possible impartiality. Besides this, the reviewer must be *independent*, as far removed as possible from either presumption or servility. To these graces he must add a tireless *industry*. And whatever may be thought to the contrary notwithstanding, this is a rarer virtue than it is commonly supposed to be. And these qualities are not acquired and exercised to advantage, either by nature or inheritance. We would like to see, from this time forward, more intelligence, sympathy, candor, independence and industry, shown in the department of critical reviews, in our medical periodical literature. By all means, let us cease to dignify mere lists of titles and booksellers' notices with the phrase "critical reviews."

IN our last number we intimated to our readers that our arrangements for the coming year were likely to be such as to render the JOURNAL more worthy of their support than ever before. We think they will all agree with us, that our promise has been redeemed, at least in the present number; and we hope it may continue to be so for the future. The JOURNAL has not only changed its title, by omitting from it the word "CHICAGO," but it has changed its appearance; and best of all, has so increased its editorial and publishing facilities as to render it possible to enable us hereafter to attain to an excellence and an influence in medical periodical literature which, we hope, may not be without good results in the department which it occupies.

The JOURNAL will, if possible, seek more distinctively than ever, so far as its space will permit, to become an exponent of all that pertains to the nervous system, whether in health or disease. It will aim to discuss in a manner at once scientific and practical, everything that pertains to the anatomy, physiology, physiological pathology and therapeutics of the nervous system, in all their relations, with reference to the peculiar studies and practical needs of members of the medical profession. But it is not intended to exclude from its pages articles on psychology proper, or insanity, or on medico-legal questions involving insanity or nervous disease, or on nervous and mental hygiene. With such a plan, which we think answers to an urgent need in the profession, and such means at our command, and with a creditable history behind it, we hope for and expect a liberal patronage from thoughtful members of the profession throughout the country. We cordially invite our old subscribers to renew their subscriptions, and to work in every way that seems best to them to extend the circulation of the JOURNAL.

IN the article of Dr. J. H. McBride on "Nitrite of Amyl in Epilepsy," published in the April number of this journal for 1875, Dr. J. Thompson Dickson is mentioned as having made certain experiments on pigeons that were in reality performed by Dr. J. G. McKendrick. We make this correction at the special request of Dr. McBride.

DURING the latter half of the past year the deaths of a number of noted medical men have been reported. Two of these, Duchenne (de Boulogne,) and J. Hughes Bennett, call for especial notice by us.

It is unnecessary to give a detailed review of the life and labors of these gentlemen, whose works are so well known, and form so prominent a part of the contributions to medical science of the day. The history of neurological medicine would be very incomplete without the most ample reference to, and acknowledgment of, the part taken by Duchenne in its development. At least two, and perhaps we might say three, of the more striking and formidable central disorders of the nervous system, owe their earliest clear description or their full recognition to his accurate insight and painstaking investigations. And, though he has not received the somewhat dubious honor of having his name attached to either of them, the value of his researches will none the less be recognized and acknowledged. In the history of electro-therapeutics he stands among the very first, if not the first; and it will be universally admitted that the introduction of the medical usage of induction currents to the regular profession, is mainly due to him. It is by this that he is most known, though his works are at best only partially known to English and American readers. The muscular disorders from affections of the nervous system, were thoroughly studied by him; and it is in this, perhaps, that his greatest services to medicine have been rendered.

Though less known as a neurologist than in some other departments, the late Dr. Hughes Bennett deserves especial mention in a journal like this, on account of his therapeutic researches, especially those lately published on the antagonisms of remedies. His labors in the department of clinical medicine are well known, and require no mention here. His death is a serious loss to medical science.

A curious fact that, perhaps, we may be allowed to notice here is, that on the post-mortem of Dr. Bennett a large tumor was found within the cranium, between the dura mater and the bone, no evidences of which were ever reported during life.

ARRANGEMENTS have been made for the holding in the city of Philadelphia, of an International Medical Congress, to begin on the 4th and end on the 9th of September next. A Centennial Medical Commission has been organized in that city, with Dr. S. D. Gross at its head; Drs. Stille and Ruschenberger, Vice-Presidents; Recording Secretary, Dr. Wm. B. Atkinson, and with Corresponding Secretaries, American and foreign, Drs. D. G. Brinton, Wm. Goodell, R. J. Dunglison and R. M. Bertolet, and Dr. Caspar Wister, Treasurer. Delegates are to represent the American Medical Association and the various state and territorial societies, as well as those of foreign countries.

The names of the Centennial Commission and its officers, given in the circular sent us, are a guarantee of the high character of the proposed Congress. We have confidence that it will be a most interesting occasion and a complete success.

At the annual meeting of the New York Society of Neurology and Electrology, held December 20, 1875, the following officers were elected for the ensuing year: President, D. B. St. John Roosa, M. D.; Vice-President, Wm. H. Draper, M. D.; Corresponding Secretary, Alfred L. Carroll, M. D.; Recording Secretary and Treasurer, Allan McLane Hamilton, M. D.; Councillors, Austin Flint, Jr., M. D., John C. Dalton, M. D., Henry D. Noyes, M. D., John I. Mason, M. D.; Curator, E. G. Janeway, M. D. The title of the society will be hereafter, "The New York Society of Neurology."

THE New England Psychological Society is the name of a newly organized association of medical superintendents of asylums for the insane. The first movement in the organization was made by Dr. B. D. Eastman, of the Worcester Lunatic Hospital. Dr. Pliny Earle was elected President, Dr. Jno. E. Tyler Vice-President, and Dr. Eastman, Secretary. The meetings are to be held quarterly.

It is intended, we are informed, to make this society pre-eminently a superintendents' association, and not to allow it to spread over the whole domain of psychology.

THE *Medical Journal and Examiner*, our only regular medical contemporary in this city, commences the present year in a new dress, and greatly enlarged and improved. It is now one of the very best journals of the country. We wish it great and continued success.

ERRATA.—The following were overlooked in the proof-reading of the fourth and eighth signatures of this issue. On page 58, third paragraph, second line, for “microseropic” read “macroscopic.” Also on page 113, thirteenth line, for “both” read “some.”
